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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Information and communications technologies for sustainable development

Macroeconomic policy questions

Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of the International Conferences on Financing for Development

Sustainable development

Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Globalization and interdependence

Groups of countries in special situations: follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Eradication of poverty and other development issues

Operational activities for development

Agriculture development, food security and nutrition

Towards global partnerships

Letter dated 22 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau of the Least Developed Countries, I have the honour to transmit herewith the ministerial declaration adopted at the annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries, held in New York on 26 September 2018 (see annex).

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I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 (a), 24, 25, 26 and 27.

(*Signed*) Perks Master **Ligoya**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Malawi to the United Nations
Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau
of the Least Developed Countries

Annex to the letter dated 22 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*

Ministerial Declaration of the Least Developed Countries

New York, 26 September 2018

We, the Ministers and heads of delegation of the least developed countries, having met in New York on 26 September 2018 to provide strategic guidance for the full, effective and timely implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,

Recalling the Istanbul Declaration[1] and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,[2] adopted by the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 9 to 13 May 2011, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 65/280 of 17 June 2011, in which the Assembly called upon all the relevant stakeholders to commit to implementing the Programme of Action, and recalling also the Political Declaration adopted by the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, held in Antalya, Turkey, from 27 to 29 May 2016, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/294 of 25 July 2016,

Reaffirming the overarching goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries in order to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and enable graduation from the least developed country category,

Recalling also the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[3] the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,[4] the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,[5] the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030[6] and the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III),[7]

Welcoming with appreciation the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020,[8] and the Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support,[9]

Adopt the following declaration:

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* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.

[1] *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9–13 May 2011* (A/CONF.219/7), chap. I.

[2] Ibid., chap. II.

[3] General Assembly resolution 70/1.

[4] General Assembly resolution 69/313.

[5] See FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, decision 1/CP.21, annex.

[6] General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

[7] [E/2017/L.32], General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

[8] A/73/80–E/2018/58.

[9] A/73/291.

1. We reiterate firm commitment to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action within the remainder of the decade, including by conducting regular reviews with the full involvement of all key stakeholders;

2. We recognize that, while the least developed countries have made significant efforts towards achieving the objectives, goals and targets of the Istanbul Programme of Action, a lot still remains to be done. The principle of country ownership and leadership remains crucial in order to accelerate progress towards sustainable development, and we recommit to take the lead in formulating, implementing, following up and reviewing our own coherent economic and development policies, strategies and plans. We call upon the international community to fulfil its commitment to give special attention to the least developed countries in the implementation of the IPoA;

3. We recognize that many of the least developed countries continue to face multiple structural challenges and constraints, including narrow production and export bases, lack of infrastructure and public services, institutional deficiencies, stagnant trade and investment flows, diminishing productivity growth and widespread poverty, hunger and malnutrition. These long-standing challenges are compounded by new and emerging challenges, such as climate change, increased incidences of natural disasters and public health emergencies, conflicts, declining commodity prices and rising capital outflows. We further recognize that the least developed countries in conflict and post-conflict situations and those experiencing political instability, or unable to deliver basic State services, have specific structural challenges and require context-specific approaches, including targeted national policies and assistance and international support measures;

4. We welcome the fact underscored by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030[10] and the New Urban Agenda (HABITAT-III) that the most vulnerable countries, including the least developed countries, deserve special attention and reflect the concerns and aspirations of these countries. We recall the decision contained in the 2030 Agenda that effective linkages will be made with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes, including on the least developed countries, underline the importance of strong synergy in the implementation of the recently adopted agendas and the Istanbul Programme of Action at the national and subnational levels. We encourage coordination and coherence in the follow-up of their implementation. In this regard, we request UN-OHRLLS to ensure synergy and coherence in the follow-up and review of the three Programmes of Action for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

5. We take note with appreciation of the Secretary-General's report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2018,[11] which indicates that there has been some progress in the achievement of the SDGs, but the progress is uneven as LDCs remain far below many of the targets of the SDGs. We look forward to further progress in, inter alia, revitalizing and enhancing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development in least developed countries, aligning existing policies with the new global plan of action, increasing policy and system-wide coherence and integration for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, addressing existing and emerging challenges, enhancing national capacities for evidence-based

[10] General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex.
[11] E/2018/64.

and data-driven decision-making and favouring participatory, cooperative and enabling environments at all levels;

6. We call upon the international community, including the United Nations system, to realize its commitment to the full and timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to provide support for mainstreaming it into the national development policies and programmes of the least developed countries. We also call upon it to realize its commitments to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, in a spirit of global solidarity, focused in particular on the eradication of poverty, the promotion of inclusive growth and the implementation of social protection systems, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable. In this regard, we appreciate the Secretary-General for convening the High-level Meeting on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in New York on 24 September 2018;

7. We are concerned that only a small number of the least developed countries are expected to reach the SDG target for GDP growth of "at least 7 per cent" in the near term. Growth in LDCs as a group is expected to rise modestly from an estimated 4.8 per cent in 2017 to 5.4 per cent and 5.5 per cent in 2018 and 2019, respectively. We are concerned that longer-term growth projections point to 35 per cent of the population in LDCs remaining in extreme poverty by 2030;

8. We express deep concern that a growing number of people are currently facing Crisis food insecurity or worse. Globally, 124 million people in 2017 were reported to be facing Crisis food insecurity or worse, fuelled by conflict, record-high food prices and abnormal weather patterns including prolonged drought conditions. Out of 51 countries facing Crisis food insecurity or worse, 33 are LDCs with a combined population of around 81.8 million.[12] We call upon the international community, especially our development partners, to enhance their financial and in-kind support to address this emergency;

9. We stress that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its widespread, unprecedented impacts disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable countries, especially LDCs. We recognize that 2017 was among the top three hottest years on record and that the global average temperature that year was 1.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.[13] We are further apprehensive that the melting of sea ice and glaciers due to rising temperatures will have deep and far reaching impact. In 2017, countries around the world, especially a number of LDCs, experienced unprecedented intense precipitation events causing heavy flooding and mudslides, devastating the lives of millions of people, and devastating the economies of many countries. There is mounting evidence that climate change is making these impacts more likely, and leading to greater loss and damage, further highlighting a need for urgent action to address loss and damage;

10. We welcome the Paris Agreement and its early entry into force, invite all its parties to fully implement the Agreement, and parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that have not yet done so to deposit their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, where appropriate, as soon as possible. We must limit global warming to 1.5°C to protect lives and livelihoods, and this means global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions has to occur by 2020 and look forward to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on 1.5°C. We also look forward to the successful conclusion of the 24th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 24) to the UNFCCC, which will be

[12] 2018 Global Report on Food Crises, WFP. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000069227/download/?_ga=2.81944915.418717270.1536177833-1292502195.1536177833.

[13] https://unfccc.int/news/2017-was-among-top-three-hottest-years-on-record.

convened on 3-14 December 2018, in Katowice, Poland. We also look forward to the dedicated climate summit in September 2019 to be convened by the Secretary-General to undertake the critical first review of the Paris Implementation;

11. We urge all international partners to provide financial and technical support and technology transfer to LDCs in the spirit of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries to ensure that all LDCs can engage effectively in low emission and climate resilient development that will protect the lives of our populations, economies and systems;

12. We are deeply concerned that despite repeated commitments, there exists a large and persistent gap between support needed and support provided in terms of finance, technology and capacity building. We call upon the development partners to operationalize the Green Climate Fund fully and in a timely manner, with the goals of mobilizing $100 billion per year by 2020, promoting and facilitating clean development mechanism projects in the least developed countries and addressing the needs of people displaced as a result of extreme weather events. We appreciate countries that have contributed to the Green Climate Fund and express concern that as of May 2018, the Green Climate Fund has only raised USD 10.3 billion equivalent in pledges from 43 state governments;[14]

13. We express grave concern that at the last 20th meeting of the Board of the Green Climate Fund, there was neither agreement on the replenishment process of the Fund nor approval of new projects. We underline the need for a quick resolution of the current stalemate and call upon our development partners to further accelerate their contributions to fulfil the $100 billion yearly benchmark. We welcome the decision of the Board of the Green Climate Fund to aim for a 50:50 balance between mitigation and adaptation over time on a grant equivalent basis and to aim for a floor of 50 per cent of the adaptation allocation for particularly vulnerable countries, in particular the least developed countries;

14. We reaffirm our support for developing an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). We stress the importance of commencing text-based negotiations at the Inter-governmental Conference convened in pursuance of the General Assembly Resolution 72/249 of 24 December 2017. We emphasize that there be preferential provisions for capacity building and transfer of technology for LDCs in order for them to derive benefits from maritime areas that constitute the "common heritage of mankind";

15. We recognize the importance of building productive capacity as a critical enabler for the development and graduation of the least developed countries. We emphasize that the development of physical infrastructure is an important prerequisite for sustained economic growth and sustainable development, and that significant amount of investment and technology are essential, including through public-private partnerships, innovative financing, regional integration and appropriate institutions and regulation, to bridge the existing savings-investment gap in the least developed countries. In this regard, we will strengthen the underlying investment climate, with enhanced support provided by the development partners and international financial institutions, including by improving predictability, governance and transparency, as well as in procurement practices and policies. We call upon the development partners to provide enhanced financial and technical support to the least developed countries for their infrastructure development and management. We look forward to the effective functioning of the multi-stakeholder forum to bridge the infrastructure gap,

[14] http://www.greenclimate.fund/how-we-work/resource-mobilization.

which should give special priority to the needs and challenges of the least developed countries;

16. We recognize that a key structural challenge in most of the least developed countries (LDCs) is to raise the share of manufacturing output in gross domestic product (GDP). We would therefore further strengthen our efforts to accelerate capital accumulation, knowledge development, technology acquisition, expansion of higher-value-addition and employment creation in manufacturing sectors. We will also stimulate productive capacity building in labour-intensive manufacturing industries, with the objective of raising output and increasing the quality of those goods that are already produced and maximizing direct employment creation for low-skilled labour;[15]

17. We recognize that agriculture, food and nutritional security and rural development are vitally important for the least developed countries. Agriculture plays a crucial role both in promoting food security and as the major economic activity for much of the population, with direct linkages to the eradication of poverty and hunger, rural development and gender equality and empowerment of women, as well as exports, commodity and production diversification, agro-processing capacity and an important source of foreign currency earnings. We therefore underline the need for adequate investment in physical infrastructure, scientific and technological development, research and agricultural extension services in the least developed countries. We recognize that commodity diversification and value addition as well as the effective participation of the least developed countries in regional and global value chains by upgrading and increasing the domestic value added and technology content of their products are vitally important so that they can gain the maximum benefit from their agricultural products;

18. We reaffirm the important role of agriculture in promoting food security. We underline the need for appropriate national, regional and global initiatives to ensure food and nutrition security in LDCs. We urge relevant UN agencies and other development partners to provide appropriate assistance to LDCs to meet their food security needs;[16]

19. We reiterate that official development assistance continues to be the largest and a critical source of external financing for the development of the least developed countries and that it provides a buffer to weather the impacts of the unstable and volatile global economic environment. We express our deep concern that total ODA from OECD-DAC countries to LDCs remains below its 2011 level, despite its estimated increase by 4 percent to about $26 billion in 2017 — the first time this figure has risen since 2010. We welcome the decision by the European Union, which reaffirms its collective commitment to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of the official development assistance/gross national income within the time frame of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and undertakes to meet collectively the target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries in the short term and to reach 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries within the time frame of the 2030 Agenda.[17] We also welcome the provisions of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda that encourage official development assistance providers to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of official development assistance/gross national income to least developed countries, and express encouragement to those providers that are allocating at least 50 per cent of their official development assistance to least developed countries. These are some

[15] Achieving the SDGs in LDCs: A Compendium of Policy Options; UNCTAD 2018.

[16] The Arab Food Security Initiative led by Sudan may be noted.

[17] See General Assembly resolution 69/313, annex.

qualitative and quantitative changes in the decades-long target on official development assistance for the least developed countries. We call upon all development partners to fulfil these targets;

20. We reiterate our call upon the donor countries to provide 0.20 per cent of their gross national income to the least developed countries by 2020 and 0.25 per cent of their gross national income by 2030 or at least 50 per cent of net official development assistance to the least developed countries;

21. We underline the fact that the allocation of global official development assistance resources should take into account the structural handicaps and constraints which are unique to the least developed countries. We call upon development partners to ensure the right balance in the allocation of official development assistance among various sectors, with particular focus on productive sectors, including infrastructure, agriculture and information and communications technology. We also call upon them to ensure quality of aid especially through predictability, using recipient country's system and eliminating tied aid;

22. We welcome the targets contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development related to migration and remittances, and strongly urge partner countries to start taking action, specifically with respect to reducing to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances by 2030 and eliminating remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent, and to facilitate the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies;

23. We recognize the agreement on a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and welcome the convening of the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Compact, which will be held in Marrakesh, Morocco, on 10-11 December 2018;

24. We recognize that while official development assistance must remain central and play a catalytic role, there is a need to tap additional resources, including through innovative financing mechanisms which can provide more stable and predictable resources for development and are based on new partnerships between countries at different levels of development and public and private actors. Specific mechanisms for innovative financing should be operationalized to mobilize additional resources for financing sustainable development. We stress that the innovative sources of financing should be additional, substantial and predictable and disbursed in a manner that respects the priorities and special needs of the least developed countries and does not unduly burden them;

25. We express our deep concern that in 2016, the share of the least developed countries in exports of goods and services continued to decline, to 0.89 per cent of world exports, down from a peak value of 1.04 per cent in 2013, thereby moving further away from the target of 2 per cent of global exports called for in the Istanbul Programme of Action and target 17.11 of the Sustainable Development Goals. We are further concerned that in 2016, services exports fell by 4 per cent, compared with 2015. We therefore call upon the members of the World Trade Organization to strongly commit to addressing the marginalization of least developed countries in international trade and to improve their effective participation in the multilateral trading system. We also call upon the members to fully and faithfully implement all the least developed country-specific provisions contained in the existing World Trade Organization agreements, ministerial decisions and declarations, including those contained in the Bali and Nairobi decisions;

26. We call upon developed country members and developing country members of the World Trade Organization declaring themselves in a position to do so

to realize timely implementation of effective duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all products originating from all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, with a view to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals target of doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020;

27. We also call upon developed country members and developing country members of the World Trade Organization declaring themselves in a position to do so to take steps to facilitate market access for least developed countries' products, including by developing simple and transparent rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries, in accordance with the Decision adopted by members of the World Trade Organization at the Tenth Ministerial Conference, held in Nairobi. We note with appreciation the progress made with respect to implementing the Ministerial Decision on Preferential Rules of Origin for LDCs under WTO. We especially note with appreciation the introduction by the European Union, Norway and Switzerland of a system of self-certification of origin for registered exporters from LDCs. We welcome the ministerial decision of the World Trade Organization on the implementation of preferential treatment in favour of services and service suppliers of least developed countries and increasing least developed countries' participation in services trade,[18] and underline the need for its full implementation;

28. We welcome the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which will address high trade costs incurred by LDCs and other developing countries, and facilitate the integration of these countries in regional and global value chains. We call upon the development and trading partners to provide targeted assistance and support to LDCs to help them build sustainable capacity to implement their commitments under the TFA, especially its Articles 13 and 21;

29. We request the WTO Members to assess the work done so far under the 1998 work programme on e-commerce, taking into account the actual needs of LDCs in terms of the digital divide, lack of regulation, lack of intrastructure, including lack of energy, electricity, internet penetration, and connectivity. We urge Members to examine issues of the digital divide and the ability of LDC suppliers to participate fairly in, and establish their own, e-commerce platforms in order to directly trade their goods and services. We also call on developed country Members to provide preferential market access to all business to consumer goods and services originating from all LDCs that are exported using an e-commerce- platform directly from LDCs suppliers. In this regard, we look forward to intensified and concerted action of the G20 countries to enhance the ability of least developed countries to more fully engage in digital trade, as committed in the G20 Summit in Germany in 2017;

30. We underline the importance of aid for trade initiatives in trade-related capacity-building; overcoming supply-side constraints; infrastructure development; and facilitating the integration of least developed countries' economies in regional and global trade. To this end, we call upon members to accord priority to the least developed countries' projects and ensure that at least 50 per cent of the aid for trade is allocated to least developed countries. We welcome the extension of the Enhanced Integrated Framework into phase two, and urge members to further intensify their efforts to secure the necessary level of contributions for the timely replenishment for effective implementation without any disruption of the Framework from 2016 to 2022;

31. We express our deep concern that the FDI flows to LDCs contracted by 17 per cent to $26 billion[19] in 2017, further to a 13 per cent decline to $38 billion in

[18] WT/MIN(15)/48-WT/L/982, 15 December 2015.

[19] UNCTAD World Investment Report 2018.

2016 compared to the previous year, with continued concentration on extractive and related industries. We underline the need for undertaking necessary measures at all levels to reverse this trend and further accelerate FDI to LDCs to meet their growing needs to realize the 2030 Agenda. We welcome the decision contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries and the offer to provide financial and technical support for project preparation and contract negotiation, advisory support in investment-related dispute resolution, access to information on investment facilities and risk insurance and guarantees, such as through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. In this regard, we take note with appreciation of the initiatives undertaken by UN-OHRLLS aiming at providing legal and technical support to LDCs in investment-related negotiations and dispute settlement through the Investment Support Programme, implemented by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and at improving the capacity of the investment promotion agencies of LDCs to attract, diversify and retain FDI and derive maximum benefit from it. We commend EU for its pledge to contribute 1 million Euro for the implementation of the investment support programme and invite donors to make generous contribution to these initiatives;

32. We reiterate our call to the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to include the issue of investment promotion regimes for the least developed countries in the agenda of the Board, with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness of United Nations system support that can contribute to enhancing the flow of foreign direct investment to the least developed countries and the ability of those countries to attract such investment. We request the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly on the progress made in this regard. We take note with appreciation the Capacity Development Programme for the investment promotion agencies of LDCs, developed by UN-OHRLLS jointly with UNCTAD, UNIDO, ILO, EIF and WAIPA; and call for financial support to this programme;

33. We recall the SDG target 17.5 which decides to "adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries" and express deep concern at the lack of progress in its implementation. We call upon Member States to take a decision at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly to establish an international investment support centre for the least developed countries under the auspices of the United Nations to provide a one-stop arrangement to help stimulate foreign direct investment in the least developed countries, which can make available the following interrelated and mutually reinforcing services, as already agreed upon in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda: (a) an information depository for investment facilities in the least developed countries; (b) provision of technical support to assist the least developed countries in preparing project documents and negotiating complex large-scale contracts; (c) provision of advisory support in dispute resolution; and (d) risk insurance and guarantees in close collaboration with the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development;

34. We are concerned that the total external debt stocks in the least developed countries increased from $155 billion in 2008 to $293.4 billion in 2017, representing an average annual rate of growth of 7.4 per cent over that period. Furthermore, the ratio of debt service to exports sharply worsened over the period, rising from 4.1 per cent in 2008 to almost 10 per cent in 2017, a worrying development should that trend continue in the coming years. During the same period, debt service as a percentage of government revenue more than doubled, increasing from 5.7 to 14 per cent, which diverted resources away from key social projects aimed at attaining sustainable development targets. These developments reflect continued reduction in the ODA

flows and increased borrowing at commercial terms by those least developed countries over the past few years, incurring substantially higher debt servicing costs. The combined effect of those trends has led to a deterioration in both the numerator and denominator of key debt ratios, giving rise to increased fragility in the financial position of a number of least developed countries;

35. We are concerned that there are risks of re-indebtedness because of the huge development needs in the least developed countries and it is a matter of deep concern that in spite of the Initiatives,[20] many least developed countries still struggle with a high debt burden. As of 01 August 2018, 5 LDCs are in debt distress and 12 others of them are at high risk of debt distress.[21] We call upon development partners to take effective measures to cancel all multilateral and bilateral debts owed by all least developed countries to creditors, both public and private, and to arrange debt standstill and debt swaps until the debt cancellation is fully realized. We also call upon creditors, both public and private, for additional effective measures to facilitate financing of our economic development, including access to both concessional and non-concessional resources for investment in critically needed infrastructure and development projects. The debt sustainability framework for LDCs should systematically take into account their structural constraints and longer-term investment requirements for the implementation of the SDGs;

36. We welcome the establishment of the Technology Bank for the least developed countries, the headquarters of which were inaugurated in Gebze, Turkey on 4 of June 2018 by which the first Sustainable Development Goal target, target 17.8, has been achieved. We take note with appreciation the pledges that the Government of Turkey has made for financial and in-kind contributions for Technology Bank. We also take note with appreciation the contributions that Norway, the Sudan, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines have made and call upon other donor countries and development partners to make substantial contributions to the successful start-up of the Bank and its effective functioning. We also take note of the proposed programme of work of Bank in several LDCs, including in the areas of STI and technology needs assessments and the promotion of digital access to research, in collaboration with other UN agencies. We also call upon them to increase their assistance dedicated to addressing the science, technology and innovation challenges of the least developed countries. We request the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to support the Technology Bank, especially in its start-up phase;

37. We underline the fact that the long-term framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should not only ensure that the goals and targets are achieved, but also secure the sustainability of the achievements. In this regard, we recall the decisions contained in the Political Declaration of the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 and the General Assembly resolution 71/238, to undertake an in-depth analysis on crisis mitigation and resilience-building for the least developed countries, at the national and international levels, with a view to building and further strengthening crisis mitigation and resilience in the least developed countries;

38. We take note with appreciation the findings and recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General on Crisis Mitigation and Resilience Building for LDCs.[22] We are deeply concerned that LDCs are disproportionately affected by a variety of systemic shocks, including economic crisis, commodity price volatility, health epidemics, natural disasters and other environmental shocks. These shocks not

[20] HIPC Initiative and MDRI.

[21] https://www.imf.org/external/Pubs/ft/dsa/DSAlist.pdf.

[22] A/72/270.

only halt the pace of economic progress and deteriorate poverty, but also undermine the capacity of LDCs to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is therefore vitally important to reduce the vulnerability of LDCs to economic, health and environmental shocks, including natural disasters and climate change, to strengthen their resilience and enhance their ability to meet these and other challenges;

39. We also note with concern that the multilateral risk reduction strategies and mechanisms are proven insufficient for LDCs, as they are often inadequately funded, call for cumbersome administrative procedures and regulatory reforms and require complex and technical proposals to access various funds. The General Assembly in its resolution 72/231 underlines the importance of improving the coordination and effectiveness of resilience-building initiatives for the least developed countries by leveraging existing measures at the national, regional and global levels to respond to various types of disasters and shocks, as elaborated in the report of the Secretary-General. We invite the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to set up an inter-agency working group to carry out this mandate. We also reiterate our invitation to the General Assembly to decide on the establishment of a "comprehensive multi-stakeholder resilience-building mechanism for LDCs", leveraging the existing measures and initiatives. The mechanism would entail a number of measures to be established or revitalized at the national, regional and global levels to respond to various types of disasters and shocks as elaborated in the report of the Secretary-General;

40. We recall the goal in the Istanbul Programme of Action to enhance capacities in energy production, trade and distribution with the aim of ensuring access for all by 2030, as well as the targets established under the SDG 7 on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. We note with concern that while the average global electrification rate reached 87.4 per cent in 2016, the average access to electricity across LDCs hovered as low as 44.8 per cent, and more than half of the world's 1 billion people without electricity live in LDCs. Furthermore, 85 per cent of the population in LDCs remain without access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking relies on biomass for cooking, underscoring the urgent need for improved access to clean and modern cooking energy. We call upon all actors, including development partners, intergovernmental financial institutions, the private sector and civil society, to work together to ensure universal, seamless and affordable access to energy, especially renewable energy to LDCs, with the establishment of modern generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure. We also invite the newly revitalized UN Energy, to focus on the specific sustainable energy challenges of the least developed countries with game-changing programmes and multi-stakeholder partnerships tailored to meet the needs of LDCs;

41. We emphasize that in globalized and interconnected world, information and communication technologies are key to allow individuals and businesses to participate in the knowledge economy including e-health, e-education e-banking and e-governance. Affordable and easily accessible broadband connectivity is an important enabler of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. We are concerned that only 16 per cent of households in the least developed countries was online in 2016, displaying a very low level of penetration compared to 80 per cent developed countries and 40 per cent in developing countries.[23] We call upon development partners to substantially scale up their support to infrastructure development and make available the financial resources and expertise to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020

[23] E/2017/66.

in line with target 9.c of the SDGs. In this regard, we take note with appreciation the work done by the UN-OHRLLS as the convenor of the Broadband Commission's working group on the vulnerable countries;

42. We reaffirm that achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and the full realization of the human rights of all people are essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. We reiterate the need for gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic, environmental and social policies;

43. We underline that North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation is vital to the least developed countries, particularly in regard to technical assistance, sharing of best practices in terms of their development, especially in areas of productive capacity-building, infrastructure, energy, science and technology, trade, investment and transit transport cooperation, we call upon the countries of the South to further strengthen their support provided to the least developed countries in all these areas in a predictable manner; and look forward to the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to be held in Buenos Aires from 20-22 March 2019 and the Third South Summit to be held in Kampala in 2019;

44. We recall the ambitious goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action to enable half the number of least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020 and commit to take the steps necessary to complete the graduation process. We take note of the recent progress in graduation, as elaborated in the ECOSOC resolution,[24] including recommendation of graduation of Bhutan, Solomon Islands and Sao Tome and Principe; and deferral of the consideration of the graduation of Tuvalu and Kiribati to no later than 2021. We take note of the concerns expressed by graduating countries and invite the General Assembly to address these concerns;

45. We acknowledge that the graduation of a country symbolizes its irreversible long-term socio-economic progress prevailing over the structural handicaps to socio-economic development. However, it also brings a lot of challenges in the form of losing the entire package of LDC-specific benefits and waivers from compliance with international obligations and commitments. We note with concern that in most cases, the graduated countries still remain far below the benchmarks under most of the SDG indicators and continue to face insurmountable challenges and vulnerabilities to various shocks and crises;

46. We note with appreciation that some development partners have extended some of the LDC-specific benefits to the graduated countries, taking into account the challenges they continue to face. However, most of these measures were taken on an ad-hoc rather than a systematic manner and benefits were granted by some partners rather than all. We reiterate that the existing processes related to graduation and smooth transition should be strengthened so that graduating and recently graduated countries will not face any disruption of their development trajectory, including challenges and uncertainties in achieving the SDGs;

47. We therefore call upon the Member States to agree on a package of benefits from development partners that the graduated countries will continue to enjoy in some critical areas of their economy for a certain period of time consistent with their development situations and needs. This can serve as a safeguard measure for the graduated countries to sustain their development path and not to relapse to the

[24] E/2018/L.22.

category of LDCs, thereby facilitating the achievement of the SGDs by 2030. This may include:[25]

(a) Support to graduating countries in costing, mobilizing resources and monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, covering all 17 Goals.

(b) More in-depth analysis of the potential impacts of graduation and identification of additional support to address the challenges of graduation.

(c) Capacity-building support to enhance access to new sources of financing, including blended financing of domestic and international resources.

(d) Facilitating increased access to other means of financing, including private finance, green bond financing and GDP-indexed bonds. Credit ratings and risk management measures, including through the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, could be helpful in this respect.

(e) Bringing together various stakeholders, including development and trading partners and the private sector to provide a platform for countries about to graduate to showcase progress and investment opportunities, for example an improved business environment and increased institutional capacity.

(f) Extension of the preparatory period to five years from the current three years before effective graduation in order to anticipate and adapt to the trade-related effects of preference loss with a view to providing greater flexibility, for example to ensure workers are retrained and can achieve productivity gains to counteract any adverse effects related to increased competition.

(g) Legal assistance to transition from the EU's Everything But Arms to the enhanced Generalised Scheme of Preferences to mitigate abrupt loss of preferences as the GSP+ offers an additional preference (in some cases comparable with the EBA).

(h) A transitional services waiver arrangement: The LDC services waiver is a new mechanism made available to and yet barely utilised by the next wave of graduates. Given the importance of services to trade nowadays, as organised within global value chains (GVC), a particular transitional arrangement could be secured for forthcoming graduates from LDC status for this preference.

(i) More targeted Aid for Trade support: To improve the effectiveness of Aid for Trade disbursements pre- and post-graduation, the GVC approach towards assessment of needs for trade-related adjustment must be adopted. Investments in infrastructure can further reduce trade costs in view of heightened competition after graduation.

(j) Enhanced technical assistance to LDCs to build and strengthen their intellectual property rights systems would enable them to comply with obligations related to intellectual property after graduation. The implementation of the intellectual property regime should be an integral part of the national smooth transition strategy, taking into account national circumstances, and assistance in this regard should be extended to the graduating country at an early stage;

48. We recall paragraph 26 of General Assembly resolution 68/224, in which the Assembly requests all relevant organizations of the United Nations system, led by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked

[25] Transitioning from LDCs: Achieving Trade-Related Adjustment, Enhanced Diversification and Reduced Economic Vulnerability by Jodie Keane and Howard Haughton, The Commonwealth Secretariat and the SG's report on Report of the Secretary-General: Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support (A/73/291).

Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, to extend necessary support in a coordinated manner to the countries that have expressed their intention to reach the status of graduation by 2020 in preparing their graduation and transition strategy, and we invite the organizations of the United Nations system, led by the Office of the High Representative, to extend the necessary technical support to the countries aspiring to graduation in developing their graduation and smooth transition strategies. We call upon the development partners to provide support for the implementation of the graduation strategy with a view to enabling those countries to graduate from least developed country status. Likewise, we call for providing support for the implementation of the smooth transition strategy after graduation, taking into account each country's development situation, in order not to disrupt its efforts towards sustainable development; In this regard, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation, effectiveness and added value of smooth transition measures and graduation support;[26]

49. We recognize the urgent need to undertake a comprehensive review of the graduation criteria for least developed countries, taking into account the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. In this regard, we recall the decisions made in the Midterm Review that the review of the graduation criteria by the Committee for Development Policy should be comprehensive, taking into account all aspects of the evolving international development context, including relevant agendas and take note of the work programme of the CDP, adopted at its nineteenth session, to undertake a review of the basic structure of the least developed country criteria and its application principles aiming to identify additional indicators that could significantly improve the least developed country identification, which would become effective in 2021.[27] In this regard, we invite the CDP to provide significantly higher weightage to the environmental vulnerabilities and take note of its decision to implement a multi-year work programme for a comprehensive review of the least developed country criteria and looks forward to its outcome;

50. We recognize that the United Nations development system is challenged to meet the growing demands for more varied assistance by doing more, quicker and better. We invite all organizations of the United Nations system and other multilateral organizations, including the World Bank Group and international and regional financial institutions, to contribute to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, including by implementing scaled-up programmes of financial and technical cooperation, to integrate it into their programmes of work, to participate fully in its review at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels, and to include in their annual reports to the Executive Boards and to the Economic and Social Council the progress made in this regard, as mandated by the Council in paragraph 9 of its resolution 2013/46;

51. We express serious concerns over the fact that the share of expenditure for operational activities for development of the United Nations system in the least developed countries is declining, urge the United Nations development system to continue to prioritize allocations to least developed countries including by allocating at least 75 per cent of their programme resources in least developed countries,[28] while reaffirming that the least developed countries, as the most vulnerable group of countries, need enhanced support to overcome structural challenges that they face in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and request the United Nations development system to provide assistance to graduating countries in the

[26] A/73/291.

[27] E/2017/33.

[28] Currently 74 per cent of core programme resources of the United Nations Development Programme is allocated for work in least developed countries.

formulation and implementation of their national transition strategies and to consider country specific support for graduated countries for a fixed period of time and in a predictable manner;

52. We welcome the General Assembly resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and emphasize the importance of its full and timely implementation. We request the Secretary-General and the UNDS Transition Team to ensure that the QCPR resolution is fully taken into account while implementing the UNDS repositioning resolution, especially in according special priority to LDCs with strengthened and reinvigorated country presence in each LDC. We reiterate that the UNDS reform remains a country led and driven process, whose implementation, plans, strategies and efforts must be guided by national strategies and efforts. We emphasize that eradicating poverty and hunger, access to public health, education and other social services, addressing the impacts of climate change and building productive capacity and infrastructure in LDCs should remain at the centre of the United Nations development cooperation efforts. The system also needs to support LDCs in data, statistics, knowledge platforms and the national implementation of the Goals through monitoring and reporting;

53. We request the Office of the High Representative to extend necessary support to the least developed countries in the implementation and monitoring of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through coordination with various United Nations entities, raising global awareness, mobilizing international support and resources in favour of the least developed countries, building multi-stakeholder partnerships and reaching out to all stakeholders, including by establishing partnerships with civil society and the private sector, to enhance support for the three groups of countries;

54. We recall paragraph 26 of General Assembly resolution 67/220, in which the Assembly invites the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to include implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action as a standing item on the agenda of the Board, and we call upon the Board to continue to follow up on the implementation of the Programme of Action and to keep the Assembly informed on a regular basis;

55. We recognize that the income-based classifications of countries are becoming less and less relevant and unable to take into account fragility and other structural constraints, while least developed countries represent the most homogenous group of countries. We therefore stress that the least developed country category should be universally recognized to facilitate the coordinated and coherent follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the international development agenda in these countries. We invite the General Assembly to take necessary measures in this regard during its seventy-third session;

56. We take note of the survey conducted by the CDP on reasons and consequences of the non-application of the least developed country category by United Nations development system entities and its findings that United Nations development system entities should not only to recognize the least developed countries category, but also to consistently apply the least developed countries category by providing international support measures, and request the United Nations development system entities to adopt common guidelines in this regard. We also request international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and regional development banks, also to consider

the least developed country category in their procedures for allocating resources and to design policies that consider the special situation of the least developed countries;[29]

57. We express deep concern that least developed countries are hugely underrepresented in the decision-making processes of the global financial architecture. Forty-seven least developed countries, with 13 per cent of the global population, collectively enjoy only 3.27 per cent of the voting power of the International Monetary Fund and 3.78 per cent of the voting power of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This needs to be addressed for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the global financial system. We recommit to broadening and strengthening the voice and participation of least developed countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting and global economic governance. We invite the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and other main international regulatory standard-setting bodies to continue efforts to increase the voice of least developed countries in norm-setting processes to ensure that their concerns are taken into consideration;

58. We recall paragraph 157 of the Istanbul Programme of Action on holding a Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries towards the end of the current decade in order to make a comprehensive appraisal of the implementation of this Programme of Action and to decide on subsequent actions. We request the General Assembly to take decisions at its 73rd Session on the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs with all organizational details and the scope and terms of reference of the Conference, including its preparatory process at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. In this regard, we request the Secretary-General to explore the potential generous host of the Conference and mobilize necessary resources for successfully holding the Conference;

59. We most sincerely acknowledge the supportive role being played by the Group of Friends of Least Developed Countries, and invite the Group to further strengthen its support for the effective realization of the Istanbul Programme of Action, the outcome of the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of all other international and regional conferences and processes as they relate to the least developed countries;

60. We express our deep appreciation to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for its able chairmanship, tireless efforts and excellent leadership provided to the least developed countries in the past three years as the Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau of the Least Developed Countries and look forward to its continued support to the promotion of the interests of the least developed countries;

61. We recall annex II of the Ministerial Declaration of Least Developed Countries entitled "Decision on a coordination mechanism for the least developed countries, adopted at United Nations Headquarters, New York, on 15 November 2001" (see A/C.2/56/5). We warmly welcome the nomination by consensus of the Republic of Malawi to serve as the Chair and Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Senegal and Yemen as the Vice-chairs of the Global Coordination Bureau for the next three years. We also warmly welcome the nomination by consensus of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, each will serve in the Bureau for one year, on an exceptional basis, for the next three years. We assure our full support and cooperation to the Bureau in discharging its responsivities.

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[29] E/2017/33.

United Nations A/73/456

General Assembly

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26 October 2018

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Seventy-third session
Agenda item 8
General debate

Letter dated 24 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Upon instruction from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the response by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the address made by the President of the Argentine Republic, Mauricio Macri, on 25 September 2018 during the general debate of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 8.

(*Signed*) Gholamali **Khoshroo**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 24 October 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Remarks in response to the address made by the President of the Republic of Argentina during the general debate of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly

The President of the Republic of Argentina, during his address to the General Assembly on 25 September 2018, made a request to the Islamic Republic of Iran for cooperation with the Argentine judicial authorities to advance the investigation into the attack on the AMIA in Argentina. In this regard, we would like to highlight the following:

The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns and rejects the acts, methods and practices of terrorism wherever, by whomever, against whomsoever committed. We do believe that there is a need for a comprehensive plan as well as close cooperation and coordination between relevant stakeholders to eradicate terrorism. As a target of terrorism in the past and today, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always been and will always remain committed to actively engaging in the fight against terrorism.

Tehran has repeatedly condemned the AMIA bombing since its occurrence and has expressed sympathy with the families of its victims. Iran accepted Argentina's call in the General Assembly tribune in 2012 for talks as a gesture of goodwill for fact-finding and rule of justice. In this regard, Tehran and Buenos Aires signed a memorandum of understanding on the issue in January 2013, but regretfully the Argentine Government is not willing to implement the agreement that it has undertaken itself.

Once again, the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes its preparedness for constructive cooperation with Argentine authorities. In this regard and as another gesture of helpfulness, we have proposed a new initiative for a meeting between the two countries' judicial officials with a view to remove the shortcomings, deficiencies and ambiguities that exist in the Argentine requests. This proposal has recently been welcomed by the Argentine Government, and we continue to constructively work with and assist the Argentine officials in this context.

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Seventy-third session
Agenda item 136
Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Proposal for the renovation of the North Building at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the proposal for the renovation of the North Building at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in Santiago (A/73/351). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 17 October 2018.

2. The renovation of the North Building is one of the near-term major construction projects identified in the report of the Secretary-General on the strategic capital review.[1] Following the earthquake in Chile in 2010, ECLAC concluded in its seismic resistance assessment of the compound's buildings that the North Building, constructed as a temporary structure in 1989, was in need of mitigation measures. In its previous report on the subject (A/72/7/Add.8), the Advisory Committee addressed the proposed strategies and mitigation measures, cost implications and other related matters, including staffing, put forth by the Secretary-General at the time. The report of the Secretary-General was submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/262 A, by which the Secretary-General was requested to refine the proposal and provide a detailed analysis thereon to the Assembly.

[1] The Advisory Committee has provided related observations and recommendations in its most recent report on the strategic capital review (A/72/7/Add.9).

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II. Progress in the implementation of the project

Cooperation with the host country Government and other Member States

3. With respect to cooperation with Member States and the host country Government, as well as voluntary contributions, the Secretary-General indicates that a host country agreement was signed in February 1948, providing for privileges and immunities, including exemptions from local taxes and import duties, for entitled staff and for official purposes, and, inter alia, for construction materials, equipment and infrastructure materials. He also indicates that the host country has provided significant support for United Nations operations in Chile and specifically for the ECLAC compound, with the land for the construction and expansion of the ECLAC compound donated by the Government of Chile in 1960 and 1997, respectively (see A/73/351, paras. 31–33). With respect to voluntary contributions provided by other member States of ECLAC, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that ECLAC is developing an outreach plan aimed at exploring potential voluntary contributions. The Committee was furthermore informed that, while ECLAC has made initial contacts with one member State with respect to the provision of technical assistance, no concrete offers have yet been made.

4. **The Advisory Committee expresses its gratitude to the host country for its continued support of ECLAC in all respects and trusts that the Secretary-General will continue to take steps to engage with the host country to ensure the success of the project. Furthermore, the Committee encourages the Secretary-General to intensify efforts aimed at engaging with other Member States regarding voluntary contributions and other forms of support for the project.**

Project management

5. Details with respect to project governance and management, including the structure of the project team, are described in the report of the Secretary-General (ibid., paras. 12–18). The Secretary-General indicates that the steps taken with regard to the overall management of the project include: (a) the establishment of a stakeholders committee, led by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC as the project owner, in March 2018, with the first meeting held on 21 July 2018; (b) the coordination with the Office of Central Support Services at Headquarters through regular meetings, general project oversight and technical guidance and advice, including lessons learned from other capital projects; and (c) the recruitment of an independent risk management firm in order to work on two United Nations construction projects, namely at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (see also A/73/425, para. 3), and at ECLAC, where it commenced work in early 2018 (see also paras. 8–10 below). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the contract for the independent risk management firm would continue until November 2024.

6. With respect to the ECLAC project team, the Secretary-General indicates that the recruitment process for the Project Manager position (National Professional Officer) has been completed. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the selected candidate started duties in August 2018. Furthermore, the Secretary-General proposes the establishment, under section 21 of the programme budget, Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean, of two temporary positions (1 Architect (Local level) and 1 Administrative Assistant (Local level)) effective 1 January 2019 until the end of the construction phase. Furthermore, the Secretary-General proposes to establish a Headquarters-based position of Project Coordinator (P-3) to provide day-to-day oversight, guidance and technical support to

the ECLAC project team, under a cost-sharing agreement with the United Nations Office at Nairobi, whereby ECLAC will contribute 25 per cent of related costs, (see also A/73/426, para. 17, and para. 26 below). **The Committee recommends the establishment of the three aforementioned positions (2 Local level and 1 P-3). The Committee emphasizes that the overall duration of the positions should correspond to the actual needs identified in the various phases of implementation of the project (ibid.).**

7. With respect to progress made regarding the consultancy services for architectural, engineering and construction management for the production of detailed design and technical documentation, the Secretary-General indicates that the issuance of a request for expressions of interest was under preparation, with work expected to commence in early 2019 (see A/73/351, paras. 40–41).

Risk management and project schedule

8. Details with respect to risk management and the overall project schedule are described in the report of the Secretary-General (ibid., paras. 22–30, 50–51 and figure II), wherein he indicates that the overall timeline of the project remains unchanged, with construction to occur in 2021 and 2022, and completion of the project at the end of 2023, despite some delays in the recruitment of the project management team and the procurement of an independent risk management firm. The Secretary-General indicates furthermore that construction efforts to date have remained on track, such as the completion in March 2018 of swing space for 73 staff members for the duration of the project. With respect to the overall risk assessment of the project, including any impact on the existing timelines, the Secretary-General indicates that a qualitative risk assessment workshop was held in July 2018, resulting in a project risk management strategy and a project risk registry. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, once a quantitative risk assessment workshop is held in the first quarter of 2019, more detailed information will be available on the scope and design elements in order to enable the conduct of a Monte Carlo analysis[2] and produce a cost-sensitivity chart.

9. With respect to the aforementioned risk register and the identification of risks, the Secretary-General indicates that, as a mitigating measure, risks will be addressed in the design phase. Of a total of 10 main project risks identified, the three greatest risks are: (a) exterior enclosure and roofing risks and possible cost variances related to manufacturing defects and assembly challenges; (b) interior construction and related possible cost variances in connection with drywall work, ceiling systems and furniture; and (c) heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) building costs, reflecting a need to import most of the related equipment owing to its unavailability in the local market, which may result in scheduling risks such as long procurement, manufacturing and importation lead times.

10. **The Advisory Committee notes the Secretary-General's intention to mitigate project risks during the design phase and looks forward to the results of the Monte Carlo analysis. The Committee trusts that updates thereon will be provided in future progress reports.**

Planning and design activities

11. The Secretary-General states that a space utilization analysis with respect to workspace efficiency was conducted in 2017, by which it was determined that the

[2] A statistical analysis method used to better understand the impact of risks in a project, by using a range of minimum to maximum values with regard to time frames and cost estimates for stages and components, through a computer-based simulation that runs multiple random project scenarios (see A/72/7/Add.6, para. 21).

overall presence of staff at their workplaces (or workspace utilization rate) averaged 53.9 per cent. Furthermore, ECLAC is in the process of undertaking a thorough design exercise that takes into consideration group/team working areas, open working areas, open shared areas, classrooms, auditoriums and meeting and conference rooms (ibid., paras. 42–45). The Advisory Committee notes that this approach is in accordance with the observation of the Board of Auditors that, drawing on lessons learned from the capital master plan at United Nations Headquarters, there is a need for future projects to incorporate flexible workplace arrangements during the initial planning and design stage in order to ensure economy and savings in time and effort (see A/73/5 (Vol. V), annex II, sect. 6). **The Committee trusts that flexible workplace arrangements at ECLAC will be an integral part of the design phases and will also be factored into the structural design proposal and contract specifications. The Committee reiterates that a clear timeline for the implementation of flexible workplace strategies, including information on established targets and efficiencies, should be included in future progress reports (see also A/72/7/Add.8, paras. 25–27).**

12. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with a visual presentation of the North Building renovation project, including relevant model graphics and charts. **The Committee considers that such information will be a useful addition to future reports and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to incorporate plans, graphics, outlines and charts into future progress reports, as appropriate. Furthermore, the Committee requests the Secretary-General to provide the latest such information to the Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report.**

Seismic mitigation

13. The Secretary-General indicates that the North Building project concept design was presented by ECLAC at a meeting of the Inter-Agency Network of Facilities Managers, held in Bangkok in May 2018, aimed at sharing knowledge of current trends and best practices carried out in other United Nations capital projects, including the ESCAP seismic mitigation project (see A/73/351, para. 39). The Advisory Committee recalls that a number of safety concerns exist with respect to the North Building pertaining to seismic code compliance, fire protection and egress and that, following the 2010 earthquake, a number of seismic improvements, repairs and maintenance were performed on all ECLAC buildings, with the exception of the North Building. **The Committee continues to stress the importance of close coordination between ECLAC and the Secretariat in New York, in particular the Office of Central Support Services, to ensure proper oversight and governance of the project. The Committee welcomes the fact that lessons learned have been shared with other capital projects facing similar challenges, such as the ESCAP and ECA projects, and trusts that this effort will continue. Furthermore, the Committee trusts that information with respect to the planned seismic mitigation measures will be included in future reports on the renovation of the ECLAC North Building.**

Procurement and use of local materials

14. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that procurement activities for the ECLAC project will be open to all international bidders, in accordance with the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, and that the selection of materials will take into consideration, for example, the suitability of materials to perform under local climatic conditions and the availability of spare parts and maintenance. The Committee was furthermore informed that it is expected that many of the required construction materials would originate from the region. **The Committee reiterates the importance of ensuring the use of locally sourced and**

manufactured materials, as well as labour, and looks forward to updates thereon in future progress reports (see also A/72/7/Add.8, para. 31).

Energy efficiency and resulting cost savings

15. The Secretary-General indicates that the North Building renovation project would result in a "net-zero" building, defined as a building where the total amount of energy used by the building on an annual basis is equal to or less than the amount of renewable energy generated on site, often producing excess energy for use elsewhere (see also A/73/351, paras. 3–5). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that several elements were needed to achieve a net-zero building, including on-site energy production, intelligent building through the use of building automation and high-efficiency building equipment.

16. The planned outcomes of the energy and water efficiency measures of the renovation project include: (a) a 40 per cent reduction in the North Building's current electrical load; (b) the generation of 115 per cent of the North Building's electrical load through a newly installed photovoltaic plant, with the 15 per cent energy surplus to be redirected to other ECLAC buildings, resulting in savings with respect to the overall operational costs of the campus; (c) reuse of 100 per cent of the North Building's wastewater for irrigation purposes through the construction of a wastewater treatment plant; and (d) a projected reduction of the North Building's annual greenhouse gas emissions,[3] in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 70/205 and 71/228, whereby the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to plan significant actions aimed at integrating sustainable development practices into United Nations operations and facilities management (ibid., paras. 5 and 8). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a net-zero building is able to store surplus energy and, as it is connected to both an external and an internal electrical grid, the building's energy is drawn from or returned to the grid by an automatic transfer switch. Upon further enquiry, the Committee was informed that the host country permits energy consumers to sell, using regulated prices, any produced surplus energy back to energy supply companies.

17. With respect to the impact of energy efficiency on overall long-term efficiency gains, the Advisory Committee recalls a cost difference in the amount of $13.8 million between strategy 1 and strategy 2 as presented by the Secretary-General in his previous report (A/72/367). At the time, the Committee recommended the implementation of strategy 2, option 1, namely the "complete building renovation strategy" or a "gut renovation" of the building, which would result in a total cost of ownership of $18.185 million, owing in large part to long-term cost efficiencies, given that the total amount of energy used would be equal to or less than the renewable energy created, as also described above. In comparison, the other option presented at the time, the "programmed multiple intervention strategy", or strategy 1, would consist of multiple renovations and repairs and result in a cumulative cost of ownership of $32 million (see A/72/7/Add.8, paras. 4–5, and 28–29). **The Committee encourages the Secretary-General to share applicable lessons learned with respect to energy efficiency in the planning and implementation of other United Nations construction projects, including the ECA and ESCAP projects and the strategic heritage plan of the United Nations Office at Geneva.**

18. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the total cost of ownership under the scope of strategy 2, a one-time building renovation, is currently estimated to result in savings of $13.8 million after a 20-year period. Furthermore, strategy 2 would provide the Organization an asset with a useful life of between 40

[3] Greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by an amount equivalent to 104.7 tons of carbon dioxide.

and 50 years, resulting in a lower total cost of ownership, whereas strategy 1 would add only approximately 10 years of useful life to the building, ending in 2029. The Committee was also informed that the total cost of ownership takes into consideration one-time construction costs, energy costs and maintenance costs, including services such as general cleaning, waste disposal, elevator operation and maintenance, electrical maintenance, HVAC maintenance and fire and safety. Upon enquiry, the Committee was also informed that, in a hypothetical scenario, rental costs for the North Building would be recovered in approximately 12 years, as renting a comparable space would cost $21 million over a 20-year period at current market rates, not taking into account a one-time investment of approximately $2.12 million for interior design and renovation of such a hypothetical rental space, as well as unspecified costs for various support services.

19. **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendation for the implementation of strategy 2, option 1; however, the Committee is of the view that there is a need to provide further details on the envisaged efficiency gains in the amount of $13.8 million and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include such information in the next progress report on the subject.**

20. With respect to the overall classification of the renovated structure, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the North Building would be designed as a class A building. The Committee recalls that, according to the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, a building with a useful life of 50 years should be classified as a class A building. The Committee also recalls that the use of quality materials and passive, fire-rated insulation in the building envelope and interior retrofitting, as well as a functional design for a healthy and safe working environment, would make the building a permanent structure with a fully extended useful lifespan (ibid., para. 22).

21. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the planned renovation of the North Building as a sustainable and energy-efficient, net-zero building. Furthermore, the Committee reiterates that the design phase will result in a structural design proposal for a class A North Building and ensure compliance with all relevant regulations (see also A/72/7/Add.8, para. 22).**

III. Project expenditures and anticipated costs

22. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the table below, showing a comparison between the previous and proposed revised cost plans, indicating an increase of $262,200 as compared with the original proposal. **The Committee is of the view that proposals for a revised project cost plan should include comparative information and explanations relating to both the original cost plan and the revised cost plan. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include such comparative information for all future construction projects, as required (see also A/73/425, para. 20, and A/73/426, para. 9).**

Comparison between previous and revised cost plans

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	A 72 367	*A 73 351*	*Difference*	
	(a)	*(b)*	*(b)-(a)*	*Reasons for the difference*
Construction costs				
Building cost	7 195.0	6 318.0	(877.0)	The outcome of the technical study to determine the type of glazing system for the facade resulted in a recommendation to replace the initially suggested triple glazing panels with double glazing panels that prove to be nearly as effective as the original choice.
Energy efficiency systems	1 337.0	1 770.0	433.0	The increase is a result of the refinement and design decisions following several technical studies of the energy efficient solutions that will decrease the North Building's environmental impact through the installation of a photovoltaic plant, a solar shading structure and a water treatment plant.
Swing space costs	91.0	400.0	309.0	Owing to a change in the swing space strategy to incorporate additional features to improve accessibility, safety and security and sustainability to ensure appropriate working conditions for staff during the construction period.
Physical security system	–	462.0	462.0	Additional requirements for safety and security equipment have emerged, relating to access control, means of egress and a fire alarm system, and so on.
Subtotal	**8 623.0**	**8 950.0**	**327.0**	
Professional services				
Consultancy	550.0	706.0	156.0	Following the technical studies and analysis of the risks on the performance of the building, in order to avoid the inappropriate selection of materials and systems and/or flawed installation, specialized consultancy firms are required for: (a) design and engineering services for the Facade ($56,000); and (b) engineering services for design and monitoring of the installation/commissioning of the photovoltaic plant ($100,000).

	A/72/367	A/73/351	Difference	
	(a)	(b)	(b)-(a)	Reasons for the difference
Risk management	200.0	200.0	–	–
Other services	–	85.0	85.0	–
Subtotal	750.0	991.0	241.0	
Escalation	2 190.0	1 657.0	(533.0)	The decrease relates to the exclusion of the escalation costs that had previously been considered for consultancy/professional services and project management costs.
Contingency	1 124.0	1 091.3	(32.7)	Revised on the basis of an overall updated estimate.
Project management				
Dedicated project management and support team	1 431.0	1 556.1	125.1	Adjusted to latest costs.
Project Coordinator at Headquarters (25 per cent of costs)	–	134.8	134.8	Project Coordinator in the Office of Central Support Services, cost-shared with the United Nations Office at Nairobi, not included in the previous report.
Subtotal	**1 431.0**	**1 690.9**	**259.9**	
Total	**14 118.0**	**14 380.2**	**262.2**	

23. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that under "other services", travel costs in the amount of $85,000 for the period 2019–2022 have been included, reflecting the travel requirements of the Project Coordinator to facilitate the risk management workshop and on-site assessment and to participate in technical evaluations for project-specific tenders and other site inspections that require physical presence. **The Committee considers that travel-related costs should be shown as a separate line item in order to ensure transparency in the resource requirements.**

24. The Advisory Committee notes from the table above that costs related, for example, to safety and security, have been omitted in the initial estimate, resulting in additional costs of $309,000 under "swing space", and $462,000 under the new category "physical security system" related to safety and security equipment, for previously unknown but essential work related to access control, means of egress and a fire alarm system. **The Committee notes with concern that, although such work is considered essential, it appears to have been previously unknown. The Committee expects that the Secretary-General will ensure that the project will deliver renovation works that conform to relevant building codes and standards, including on accessibility, seismic mitigation and workplace safety. The Committee further notes that the additional costs, including for safety and security-related requirements, amount to a cumulative total of $771,000, and trusts that the Secretary-General will provide the General Assembly a further breakdown of these related costs.**

25. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the approved funding for 2018 amounts to $160,000, with no actual expenditure incurred as at 30 June 2018 (see A/73/351, para. 52 and table 2). Projected expenditure for the remainder of 2018

would amount to $125,000, with the unused balance of $35,000 attributable to the late recruitment of the Project Manager in August 2018 (see also para. 6 above).

26. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the resource requirements for 2019 amount to $711,700,[4] comprising:

(a) $266,700 under budget section 21, Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean, for the project management team, namely for the continuation of the existing Project Manager (National Professional Officer); two new positions (Local level), effective 1 January 2019; and 25 per cent of the cost of one Project Coordinator (P-3), the cost of which would be shared with the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

(b) $445,000 under section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance, for professional services related to the lead consulting firm and the risk management firm and provision for contingencies (ibid., paras. 53 and 54).

Multi-year construction-in-progress account

27. The Secretary-General proposes the establishment of a multi-year construction-in-progress account (ibid., para. 56 (e)). The Advisory Committee recalls that in this type of account the expenditures of major construction projects approved by the General Assembly as part of the programme budget are recorded. Funding does not expire at the end of a financial period and, upon the completion of the project, expenditures are to be reported with any unused amounts to be returned to Member States. Multi-year construction-in-progress accounts are also used with projects in Bangkok and Addis Ababa (see A/72/7/Add.8, para. 32). The Committee recalls that the Secretary-General has proposed the establishment of a multi-year special account for the strategic heritage plan in Geneva (see A/73/395, paras. 108 and 109). **The Committee recommends the establishment of a multi-year construction-in-progress account.**

IV. Conclusion

28. The recommendations of the Secretary-General on proposed actions to be taken by the General Assembly are set out in paragraph 56 of his report. **Subject to its recommendations and observations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Approve the proposed overall scope of the project and its maximum cost and implementation strategy;**

(b) **Approve the establishment of two temporary positions (Local level), effective 1 January 2019, within the dedicated project management team, under section 21, Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean, of the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019;**

(c) **Take note of the proposed establishment of the position of Project Coordinator (P-3), for which approval has been sought in the context of the project for the replacement of office blocks A–J at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and the joint funding of that position within the overall costs of both projects;**

(d) **Appropriate an amount of $676,700 for the project in 2019, comprising $231,700 under section 21, Economic and social development in Latin**

[4] The gross amount is $711,700. The net amount is $676,700, which takes into account the unused balance of $35,000 at the end of 2018.

America and the Caribbean, and $445,000 under section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance, of the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, which would represent a charge against the contingency fund;

(e) Approve the establishment of a multi-year construction-in-progress account for the project.

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Agenda item 139
Pattern of conferences

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/73/93). In addition, the Committee had before it the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2018 (A/73/32), which includes the text of a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences in annex I. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 17 October 2018.

2. The report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/19 and other relevant mandates and contains information on matters relating to meetings management and documents management in 2017, together with cost-efficiency initiatives and cross-cutting issues. **The Committee notes that resources are not requested in connection with the report and there are no immediate financial implications resulting from the report.**

II. Conference management strategy

3. In paragraph 5 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that a harmonized conference management strategy has been achieved by means of the mandated delineation of responsibilities among the four duty stations and that a working group has been established to review the key performance indicators of conference management operations. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the agreed delineation of policy and operational responsibilities in conference services among the Under-Secretary-General of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors-General of the offices away from Headquarters as well as other accountable officials.

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The Committee trusts that the information relating to the agreed delineation of responsibilities regarding conference management across the four duty stations will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General. The Committee welcomes the harmonized conference management strategy and looks forward to receiving more detailed information regarding future delineations in the delegation of authority and the assessment of individual capacities in conference management.

III. Meetings and documents management

Innovations in meetings and documents management

4. In his report, the Secretary-General provides information relating to a number of innovations in meetings management (A/73/93, paras. 22–29) and documents management (ibid, paras. 47–51). Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided with a comprehensive list of pilot projects currently under way in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and notes that the Department is currently working on an extensive number of innovations and pilot initiatives. **The Committee welcomes the initiatives of the Department and notes that the majority of the projects have been developed and implemented utilizing in-house capacity and expertise. The Committee trusts that information relating to the pilot projects will be provided to the Assembly at the time of its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General.**

Remote interpretation

5. The Secretary-General indicates that the increased use of remote meeting participation and videoconferencing tools (where participants are not in the meeting room) has posed new challenges for the interpretation services and guidelines on technical requirements and standards for remote participation and videoconferencing were therefore prepared in early 2018 and shared with intergovernmental bodies and relevant units of the Secretariat in New York. He also indicates, in paragraph 28 of his report, that the practical and technical feasibility of remote interpretation (where the interpreters are not in the meeting room) between the four duty stations has been assessed, resulting in recommendations that included setting up a dedicated room at each duty station to test distance interpretation. The Advisory Committee notes that the concept of remote interpretation could present a number of challenges for interpreters, resulting in a potential impact on quality. The Committee was informed that a previous pilot project had been halted by the General Assembly and that remote interpretation was not currently being utilized by any international organization. **The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide additional justification for the proposed pilot project for the consideration of the Assembly.**

Documents processing

6. With respect to the cost parameters for the production of a United Nations document and for interpretation into the six official languages, the Advisory Committee was provided, upon request, with detailed information on such costs in 2018, including for meeting services (see annex).

Nairobi conference centre

7. In paragraphs 10 to 12 of his report, the Secretary-General provides details regarding the deteriorating condition of the Nairobi conference centre and the limited capacity to provide conference services. He indicates that the conditions of the centre are severely hampering the utilization of meeting services and that the utilization rate

of the facilities declined to 39 per cent in 2017. He indicates further that the current conditions of the conference centre pose an immediate risk to the servicing of the main calendar events to be hosted in Nairobi. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, given the interdependence of equipment, furniture and overall conference infrastructure, any significant upgrades and replacements would require holistic planning among building, information technology and conference management teams. As a result, dedicated resources would need to be provided to cover the maintenance costs.

8. The Advisory Committee was also provided with additional information regarding the status of the conference facility, the urgency of the conditions and the need for an upgrade of the centre, as identified by the Secretary-General in his report on the strategic capital review (A/70/697). **The Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the concerns of the Secretary-General and the information provided regarding the condition of the conference centre at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The Committee recommends that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a proposal for addressing the matter expeditiously.**

Conference facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa

9. In paragraph 18 of his report, the Secretary-General provides information on the utilization and improvement of the conference facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). He indicates that the percentage of available conference resources used in 2017 remained high, at 90 per cent, and that facilities will be improved with the installation of redesigned accessible podiums and adjustable lecterns in conference rooms 1 and 2 in 2019. He also indicates that premises must be renovated regularly and that, since Addis Ababa is expanding rapidly, urgent technological improvements are needed to ensure that the Commission maintains its ability to provide cutting-edge conference services. He also states that a capital investment plan to facilitate digital technology upgrades at the conference centre during the period 2018–2022 has been finalized and that the Africa Hall renovation project is due to be completed in 2021. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the technologies and endowment of Africa Hall were not adequate to guarantee conference management functionalities and that a complete replacement of all installations, including conference management, audiovisual and broadcasting technologies, was foreseen for the renovation project. The Committee notes the condition of the conference facilities at ECA and provides further observations and recommendations on this issue in its report on progress made in the renovation of Africa Hall and the construction of new office facilities at ECA in Addis Ababa.

Non-calendar meetings

10. In paragraph 30 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that requests for the use of United Nations premises for non-calendar meetings and side events have continued to increase in New York, Geneva and Vienna. With regard to the increases in non-calendar meetings in New York the Advisory Committee was informed that non-calendar meetings and events in 2017 accounted for 73 per cent of total meetings, compared with 56 per cent in 2012 (see table 1). In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the additional work generated has strained the meetings management services in New York in 2017.

Table 1
Number of calendar and non-calendar meetings, 2012–2017

	2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*
Non-calendar meetings	5 192	5 209	7 294	10 000	9 863	9 789
Calendar meetings	4 091	4 493	4 600	5 168	5 107	3 687
Total meetings	9 283	9 702	11 894	15 168	14 880	13 476
Percentage non-calendar/ calendar meetings	56/44	54/46	61/39	66/34	66/34	73/27

11. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the increase in non-calendar meetings was attributable to the increasing number of requests from Member States for the use of United Nations conference rooms and the General Assembly Hall for events that did not form part of the official functions of the Organization. These included, but were not limited to, model United Nations conferences, discussions and dialogues, concerts and film screenings, special events, side events, informal briefings, meetings of groups of Member States, and meetings and events sponsored by Permanent or Observer Missions to the United Nations.

12. The Advisory Committee was also informed that an essential principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was the recognition of civil society as a key stakeholder in the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Each year, approximately 7,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations participate in intergovernmental events at the United Nations in New York. Because non-governmental organizations have become more active at the international level and more directly engaged in intergovernmental processes, the number of side events related to mandated meetings has increased exponentially in the past three bienniums. In terms of the range of entities requesting non-calendar meetings, the Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that a request might be made by an intergovernmental or expert body, a Secretariat entity, a regional group, a Member State, an agency, fund or programme of the United Nations system or any other entity for which no budgetary provision existed under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, of the programme budget.

13. The Secretary-General indicates in paragraph 30 of his report that a study is being conducted in New York on the establishment of a mechanism whereby cultural activities, meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process are charged for the associated costs. He indicates that a cost-charging mechanism similar to that used in the United Nations Office at Geneva is being reviewed and that the administrative instruction dated 26 April 1996 on the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits (ST/AI/416) will also be revised to reflect the launch of the one-stop-shop solution for requesters of meeting services. He further indicates, in paragraph 29 of the report, that a tool to automatically determine the resource and financial implications of conference services, technical and support services of meetings and special events, based on the requirements specified by the user, was developed at the United Nations Office at Geneva in 2017.

14. In terms of the mechanism applied in Geneva that forms the basis of the New York study, the Advisory Committee was informed that cost reimbursement was sought for services not covered by the programme budget. The Committee was further informed that the United Nations Office at Geneva used the Umoja service delivery module to calculate the cost for meetings and special events and to charge clients for extrabudgetary meetings. In addition, an extrabudgetary calculator tool had been

launched on a pilot basis for the Office of Disarmament Affairs in September 2018 to simplify the financial planning process for extrabudgetary meetings and events by generating financial scenarios with cost implications for clients.

15. **The Advisory Committee notes the significant increase in non-calendar meetings and events in New York in the past five years and the increasing requests made of the Secretariat, and of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in particular. The Committee looks forward to the results of the study being conducted in New York regarding a cost reimbursement mechanism for cultural activities, meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process.**

III. Staffing

16. In paragraphs 52 to 62 of his report, the Secretary-General describes a number of measures introduced in 2017 regarding recruitment and replenishment of the rosters for language posts. These include remote recruitment testing, expanded outreach to potential recruits, training of potential recruits through internships and traineeships, implementation of the diamond-shaped staffing structure, utilization of electronic workflows and optimization of capacity use. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to address the staffing challenges of the Department.**

17. In table 2 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the vacancy rates for text processing in New York and Geneva as at 31 December 2017 were 14 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. **The Advisory Committee recalls the staffing challenges faced by the Department in text processing and trusts that the restructuring will lead to a reduction in the vacancy rate.** The Secretary-General also indicates that the vacancy rates in Nairobi were 37 per cent for interpretation, 14 per cent for translation and 14 per cent for text processing. The Committee notes the continuing vacancies in the interpretation services in Nairobi and encourages the United Nations Office at Nairobi to make further outreach efforts to educational institutions in the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation, African universities teaching interpretation and translation and other relevant institutions in order to increase applications from qualified applicants and reduce vacancy levels.

Remote testing

18. In paragraphs 55 and 56 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that recruitment testing was conducted in 2017 and that, of the six language competitive examinations held, three were combined examinations for translators, editors, verbatim reporters and copy preparers, proofreaders and production editors. The testing resulted in the rostering of 143 language professionals for recruitment in 2018. All of the combined examinations in 2017 were conducted remotely and were accessible electronically to any qualified applicant with a computer and Internet connection, including persons with physical disabilities. The Secretary-General indicates that the number of applicants increased from 3,203 to 6,739, and that the proportion of applicants from traditionally underrepresented regions rose from 20 to 33 per cent in the English examination and from 25 to 47 per cent in the French examination. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that, with respect to the three combined competitive examinations conducted remotely, the number of applicants per vacant post was estimated at approximately 67 applicants per post projected to become vacant in the next three years. **The Committee welcomes the use of remote testing as a recruitment tool and looks forward to receiving a**

further update on this initiative in the context of the next report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences.

Temporary assistance for meetings

19. In paragraph 54 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that temporary assistance for meetings is used to retain qualified freelance language professionals to handle surges in workload and to cover temporary in-house capacity shortfalls. He also indicates that, as a result of a number of factors, the Secretariat has reduced its expenditures on temporary assistance across the four duty stations for in-house translation, interpretation and verbatim reporting by $1.8 million (11 per cent), $2.4 million (19.5 per cent) and $70,000 (2.6 per cent), respectively, recording an overall decrease of $4.21 million (13.6 per cent) between 2016 and 2017. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the expenditures on temporary assistance across the four duty stations (see table 2). The Committee was informed that fluctuations from year to year reflected the close linkage between the utilization of temporary assistance and the scheduling of major conferences, as well as fluctuations in the programme budget implications in any given year.

Table 2
Expenditures on temporary assistance across the four duty stations
(United States dollars)

	2013	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*
Translation					
New York	3 322 816	3 585 183	3 220 872	5 662 325	5 462 365
Geneva	5 895 400	7 386 500	7 680 500	9 089 522	7 232 236
Nairobi	393 918	57 093	232 834	37 870	57 460
Vienna	1 055 134	970 500	1 046 356	1 211 090	1 496 922
Interpretation					
New York	3 071 221	4 317 061	5 723 140	5 181 190	3 521 437
Geneva	1 849 400	2 388 400	2 456 600	3 964 394	2 997 975
Nairobi	1 853 308	2 170 625	1 218 886	1 603 125	1 518 728
Vienna	1 386 180	1 563 107	1 736 348	1 497 529	1 818 991
Verbatim reporting					
New York	1 654 337	1 919 654	2 308 001	2 676 027	2 606 154

IV. Facilities and accessibility

20. In paragraphs 63 to 66 of his report, the Secretary-General provides an overview of activities and initiatives related to the accessibility of persons with disabilities to conference services and facilities. The Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat sought to ensure greater accessibility of the meetings of direct relevance to persons with disabilities in 2017, such as meetings in New York of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, dedicated meetings of the Human Rights Council, meetings of the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other events. He also indicates that the Interdepartmental Task Force on Accessibility launched a survey soliciting feedback from all users of Headquarters facilities in New York on their accessibility and that the responses are being used to develop a detailed plan for improving accessibility.

21. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the range of accessibility services in the area of documentation and conference services. Nevertheless, the Committee notes that the concept of accessibility has evolved to the extent that the requirements and ramifications encompass much wider considerations across headquarters locations, offices away from Headquarters and other duty stations, as well as considerations for current and future staff members and Member States. These include, but are not limited to, recognition of the range of disabilities affecting individuals (physical, cognitive or other), access to physical facilities, availability of assistive and accessible technologies, measures to ensure physical and psychological well-being in the workplace, organizational socialization practices, tailored onboarding of new staff members with disabilities, inclusiveness and integration efforts and the provision overall of reasonable accommodation for temporary or permanent conditions. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will duly consider the breadth of issues associated with the matter of accessibility and the context in which to report annually and in a comprehensive manner thereon.**

V. Conclusion

22. **Subject to its comments and recommendations in the paragraphs above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

Annex

Cost parameters related to documentation and meeting services in 2018

A. Production of one United Nations document

(United States dollars)

	New York		*Geneva*		*Vienna*		*Nairobi*	
	8,500 words, 26 pages	*10,700 words, 32 pages*	*8,500 words, 26 pages*	*10,700 words, 32 pages*	*8,500 words, 26 pages*	*10,700 words, 32 pages*	*8,500 words, 26 pages*	*10,700 words, 32 pages*
Cost of one document[1]	26 000	32 500	29 100	36 600	26 300	32 900	25 000	31 400

[1] The cost of processing one document includes costs related to translation, revision, text-processing and editing, as well as printing and distribution.

B. Meeting services for up to two days

(United States dollars)

	New York	*Geneva*	*Vienna*	*Nairobi*
Cost of one meeting/day/six official languages[1]	11 900	12 500	12 500	17 900

[1] Total cost for one meeting/day covering the six United Nations official languages.

C. Meeting services for more than two days

(United States dollars)

	New York	*Geneva*	*Vienna*	*Nairobi*
Cost of one meeting/day/six official languages[1]	16 800	17 600	16 700	27 300

[1] Total cost for one meeting/day covering the six United Nations official languages.

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Question of Palestine

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 15 October 2018 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

As Israel, the occupying Power, and its officials persist with their campaign of inflammatory rhetoric, misinformation and deliberate and dangerous propaganda against the Palestinian people and their leadership, I am compelled to draw your attention to a statement issued today, 15 October 2018, by the Mayor of Bethlehem, the Honorable Advocate Anton Salman, in response to comments made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Bethlehem and the situation of Palestinian Christians (see annex).*

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 39, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer

* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.

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Annex to the identical letters dated 15 October 2018 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

Statement dated 15 October 2018 by the Mayor of Bethlehem, Advocate Anton Salman, on comments delivered by the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, on Bethlehem and the situation of Palestinian Christians

Yesterday's statement by Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu is another Israeli attempt at distorting the reality of the Israeli occupation and particularly the effects that Israeli policies have had on the Palestinian Christian community since 1948.

If Mr. Netanyahu was concerned about the situation of Palestinian Christians, particularly in the Bethlehem Area, he would return the 22,000 dunums of Bethlehem land illegally annexed to Israel for expansion of colonial settlements. He would dismantle the annexation wall that divides Bethlehem from Jerusalem for the first time in 2000 years of Christianity and would stop imposing restrictions to Palestinian movement, including the thousands of Palestinian Christians living in exile and whose return is impossible due to the Israeli control over the Palestinian population registry. For example, in Jordan alone, a few kilometers away, there are at least 20,000 Palestinian Christians from the Bethlehem area that are denied family unification and even cannot enter the city, not even to celebrate Christmas, due to the Israeli military restrictions.

We would like to remind Mr. Netanyahu that it was himself who supported the building of one of the most damaging colonial-settlements that surround Bethlehem, Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa), and that in 2015 he declared that by doing so he is preventing the connection between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. There are over 100,000 Israeli settlers surrounding Bethlehem from all its sides, reducing the area of Palestinian control over Bethlehem to less than 13% of the district, and making it impossible to plan for the future of our city. Furthermore, it was Mr. Netanyahu who voiced objection to declaring The Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage route as a World Heritage site and his policies of harassment were behind the decision of the Churches to close the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for three days in Jerusalem in objection to Church taxation policy.

His comment was also full of historical inaccuracies. It is shameful that while calling himself a "protector of Christianity", he would use Christians as a tool for his Islamophobic talking points. The decrease in the percentage of Christians in Bethlehem, as well as in the rest of Palestine, was provoked with the Nakba of 1948 and ongoing due to Israel's colonial plans and policies that started in 1967. This was also the case in West Jerusalem, from where a large Palestinian Christian community was expelled by Israel from Ein Karem, Talbiya, Qatamon, and other places. From 31,000 Christians in 1948, Jerusalem only has around 12,000 Christians today.

We would like to advise Mr. Netanyahu to stop using Christians as a tool to pinkwash the occupation. The best he could do for future of peace and coexistence, where the Christian community would thrive again, is to respect his obligations under International Law, including Security Council resolutions 478 on Jerusalem and 2334 on settlements, dismantling illegal colonial-settlements and the annexation Wall surrounding Bethlehem, including in the Cremisan Valley, fully end the occupation of Palestine and allow for the return of our people to their city. It is not the Palestinian government that prevents their return Mr. Netanyahu: It is your government.

I would like to use this occasion to call upon the heads of the churches in Jerusalem as well as to the Holy See to raise their voices against the use of religion for political purposes. It cannot be tolerated anymore that the Bible is used wrongfully in order to justify crimes and violations that go against the teachings of values spread by Our Lord Jesus Christ.